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Kotsonas, A., Kiriati, E., Charalambidou, X., Roumpou, M., Müller, N.S., Bessios, M. 2017. "Transport amphorae from Methone: An interdisciplinary study of production and trade ca. 700 BC", in J. Strauss Clay, I. Malkin & Y. Tzifopoulos (eds.), *Panhellenes at Methone: Graphê in Late Geometric and Protoarchaic Methone, Macedonia (ca 700 BCE)*, Berlin/Boston, 9-19.

Charalambidou, Xenia (Polyxeni); Kiriati, Evangelia ; Müller, Noemi S.; Kotsonas, Antonis; Roumpou, Maria; Bessios, Manthos

published in

J. Strauss Clay, I. Malkin & Y. Tzifopoulos (eds.), *Panhellenes at Methone: Graphê in Late Geometric and Protoarchaic Methone, Macedonia (ca 700 BCE)*, Berlin/Boston

2017

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Charalambidou, X., Kiriati, E., Müller, N. S., Kotsonas, A., Roumpou, M., & Bessios, M. (2017). Kotsonas, A., Kiriati, E., Charalambidou, X., Roumpou, M., Müller, N.S., Bessios, M. 2017. "Transport amphorae from Methone: An interdisciplinary study of production and trade ca. 700 BC", in J. Strauss Clay, I. Malkin & Y. Tzifopoulos (eds.), *Panhellenes at Methone: Graphê in Late Geometric and Protoarchaic Methone, Macedonia (ca 700 BCE)*, Berlin/Boston, 9-19. In J. Strauss Clay, I. Malkin & Y. Tzifopoulos (eds.), *Panhellenes at Methone: Graphê in Late Geometric and Protoarchaic Methone, Macedonia (ca 700 BCE)*, Berlin/Boston

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Panhellenes at Methone

Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes

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Volume 44

Panhellenes at Methone

Graphê in Late Geometric and Protoarchaic Methone,
Macedonia (ca. 700 BCE)

Edited by Jenny Strauss Clay, Irad Malkin and
Yannis Z. Tzifopoulos

DE GRUYTER

ISBN 978-3-11-050127-8

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-051569-5

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-051467-4

ISSN 1868-4785

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2017 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Logo: Christopher Schneider, Laufen

Typesetting: jürgen ullrich typesatz, 86720 Nördlingen

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

♻️ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

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Antonis Kotsonas, Evangelia Kiriati, Xenia Charalambidou,
Maria Roumpou, Noémi Suzanne Müller and Matthaios Bessios

Transport Amphorae from Methone: An Interdisciplinary Study of Production and Trade ca. 700 BCE

Abstract: Amongst the exceptionally rich finds recovered from the “Ypogeio” of Methone was a large assemblage of Aegean and other transport amphorae of the Early Iron Age and Archaic periods. The importance of this assemblage, which lies in the quantity and range of amphora types represented, and also in their early date, stimulated the project discussed in this paper, which implements interdisciplinary research protocols. This project proposes a holistic approach to Greek transport amphorae combining typological and epigraphical evidence with the results of petrographic and elemental analyses on the provenance of these vessels, and of organic residue analysis on their content. This approach can reshape our understanding of the production and distribution of transport amphorae, and also of trade and economy in early Greece.

Amongst the exceptionally rich finds that were recovered from the “Ypogeio” of Methone was a large and varied assemblage of Aegean and other transport amphorae of the Early Iron Age and Archaic periods (Bessios 2003; Bessios *et al.* 2004; Bessios *et al.* 2008; *Methone Pierias I*; Kotsonas 2012; Kotsonas 2015, 256). Indeed, transport amphorae dominate the corpus of inscribed pottery published in *Methone Pierias I*, as opposed to other functional categories of ceramics, which are much less represented (Kotsonas 2012, 222–224). Inscribed amphora types identified macroscopically include Thermaic, Corinthian, Attic and Euboean SOS, Cycladic, Samian, Milesian, Chian, Lesbian, in addition to roughly a dozen types of unknown provenance, which are poorly represented (Kotsonas 2012, 150–162, 184–219).¹ The non-inscribed amphora material from the “Ypogeio” includes many more specimens of the well-known types in question, in addition to sev-

¹ We think it is more accurate to refer to Thermaic type amphorae, Corinthian type amphorae etc., and we have maintained this format in the subtitles of this paper. However, in the text we use the shorter, traditional version for the sake of brevity. On Thermaic amphorae (also known as Catling’s type II amphorae, or North Aegean amphorae), see below. The amphorae of Milesian type tentatively labelled ‘Methonean’ in Kotsonas 2012, 150–154, have since been correctly identified as Milesian, as we noted in our oral presentation to the conference in 2012.

eral Phoenician amphorae (Bessios 2003, 449; Kasseris 2012; Kotsonas 2012, 238) and numerous pieces from thinly represented types of unknown provenance.

Most of the amphorae from the “Ypogeio” come from the original filling of Phases I to III, which dates to ca. 700 BCE (Bessios 2012).² More scanty is the amphora material from the overlying phases IV to VI, which represents very different activities in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. Accordingly, the focus of this paper, and of our interdisciplinary study in general, is on the rich assemblage from the filling of ca. 700 BCE.

The importance of this assemblage lies in the quantity and range of amphora types represented, but also in its early date. Scholars generally believe that the widespread production and distribution of Greek transport amphorae only began in the late 7th century BCE (e.g. Twede 2002, 98), with only few types dating earlier. Small groups of finds published from different Mediterranean areas, including Carthage, Spain and Israel (Docter 1997; Fantalkin/Tal 2010), suggested an earlier date for several more types, but these studies have not been given the attention they deserve. The assemblage from Methone, which is dated by a wide variety of fine-ware imports from Attica, Corinth, Euboea, and East Greece, re-affirms the early dates proposed by other scholars for different amphora types, and invites the rethinking of established assumptions about trade in the Early Iron Age.

The importance of the amphora assemblage from Methone stimulated the present project of interdisciplinary research. This project is aimed at testing stylistic and macroscopic attributions on amphora provenance and traditional assumptions on amphora content through the targeted application of a combination of analytical techniques. Its overall objective rests on exploring holistically issues of typology, provenance, technology, and content by integrating traditional approaches, including macroscopic examination, typological classification and the study of inscriptions and graffiti, with applications of archaeological science, including petrographic, elemental and organic residue analyses. It is the first time that a project of such scope has been conducted on Greek transport amphorae of any period, and the best comparable works involve prehistoric Canaanite jars (see the Canaanite Amphorae Project, led by Margaret Serpico and Janine Bourriau)³ and Aegean stirrup jars (Haskell *et al.* 2011), as well as Roman amphorae (Pecci/CauOntiveros 2010, 2). Nevertheless, several scholars, most notably Alan Johnston (Johnston/Jones 1978; de Domingo/Johnston 2003; Johnston 2004), Pierre Dupont (1982, 1998, 2010), Ian Whitbread (1995),

² A fuller overview of the stratigraphy of the “Ypogeio” will be provided by Bessios in a forthcoming volume on the excavations at Methone, 2003–2013.

³ http://www.amarnaproject.com/pages/recent_projects/material_culture/canaanite.shtml.

and Mark Lawall (1995, 2011a, 2011b) have integrated archaeological and archaeometric research in studies of Greek amphorae of Archaic to Hellenistic date.

A wide range of amphora types were sampled from the “Ypogeio”. Macroscopically, these types include Corinthian, Attic and possibly Euboean SOS, Milesian, Samian, Chian, Lesbian, Thermaic and Phoenician amphorae, in addition to some of the types of unknown provenance, which are thinly represented. A total of 75 samples were selected for petrographic analysis with thin sections and elemental analysis (through wavelength dispersive X-ray fluorescence) to address questions of provenance and production. The petrographic analysis adheres to – and elaborates on – Whitbread’s (1995) seminal study, and is based on the extensive reference collection of the Fitch Laboratory, British School at Athens. Additionally, 45 of the samples in question were also subjected to organic residue analysis using combined gas chromatography-mass spectrometry at the laboratories of the Harokopio University in Athens, in accordance with established protocols for the extraction of lipids from archaeological samples (Evershed *et al.* 1990; Stern *et al.* 2000; Roumpou *et al.* 2013).

In this paper we provide a short and preliminary report on only four types of amphorae encountered at the “Ypogeio” of Methone: Chian, Lesbian, Attic SOS and Thermaic. The analytical data and interpretations of the entire material sampled by our project will be made available to readers in the near future, as the full publication of our work is forthcoming.⁴

Chian type amphorae

Chian amphorae were quite common in the “Ypogeio” of Methone and this applies not only to the filling of Phases I to III, which concern us here, but also to the overlying layers of Phases IV to VI. Twelve inscribed pieces of Chian amphorae, representing a minimum of six individual vessels, were recently published (*Methone Pierias I*, 368–369 no. 21, 461–464 nos. 127–131, 498–501; Kotsonas 2012, 201–205). Early Chian amphorae stand out on the basis of their fabric and morphology (including the thick white slip that is peculiar to the type) and are widely distributed in the Aegean and the Mediterranean (Kotsonas 2012, 201–205, with references; Bîrzescu 2012, 49–90; Filis 2012, 262–268; Sezgin 2012, 83–135). There are several major studies of Chian amphorae, including publications of petrographic and elemental analyses (Dupont 1982, 194–198; Jones 1986,

⁴ Additionally, the publication of the entire amphora assemblage from the “Ypogeio” is in preparation by Kotsonas.

283–284; Whitbread 1995, 143; Dupont 1998, 146; de Domingo/Johnston 2003, 33–34). Ten pieces from the “Ypogeio” of Methone were sampled for the purposes of our project. All samples reflect a single technological tradition and a single coarse fabric with inclusions of predominantly sedimentary and meta-sedimentary origin and very small amounts of volcanic fragments, indicating a common geological origin for the raw materials used in all cases. The pieces from Methone are compatible with the geology of Chios and compare well with other Chian white-slipped amphorae analysed previously (Whitbread 1995, 135–153, Chian Fabric Class 1; de Domingo/Johnston 2003, 30, 33–34, 41; Moschonisioti *et al.* 2005, 255, 263–264).⁵ The largely undifferentiated geology of the island does not allow for the straightforward localization of specific workshops. Following Whitbread, we suggest that a potential source, for at least some of the Chian amphorae from Methone could lie at the vicinity of Emborio, in the south part of the island, where Neogene sediments, including clays, co-exist with small outcrops of volcanic rocks (cf. Whitbread 1995, 138).

Five of the ten Chian amphorae involved in the project were also sampled for organic residue analysis, which offered interesting insights into their content. Chian amphorae are generally thought to have carried wine. This assumption is based on literary (but not epigraphic) sources on the reputation of Chios as a wine producing island (Dupont 1998, 148, 151; Demesticha 2011; Filis 2012, 267). Lawall, however, has raised the possibility that Chian amphorae were used for the transportation of a variety of products (Lawall 2011a, 27). This is supported by DNA analysis applied to a Chian amphora from a shipwreck of Classical date, where ancient genetic plant material of olive and oregano were identified (Hansson/Foley 2008). It has also been reported that Chian amphorae recovered from another shipwreck were filled with olive pits (Barron 1986).

Interestingly, the residue preserved in the Chian amphorae sampled from Methone largely consists of fatty acids, with C_{16:0} (palmitic acid), C_{18:0} (stearic acid) and the monounsaturated C_{18:1} being predominant (the last was very pronounced in several cases). Additionally, in at least two samples fatty acids are detected along with dehydroabietic and abietic acids, and diterpenoids that characterise plant resins (Pollard/Heron 2008, 239). The presence of fatty acids in general indicates that the original produce was either plant oil or animal

⁵ Despite the similarity in the composition of all analysed samples, analysis with wavelength dispersive X-ray fluorescence distinguished between the samples from the original filling of Phases I to III, which date ca. 700 BCE, and pieces from the overlying phases IV to VI of the late 7th and 6th century BCE, which were sampled for comparative purposes. This result needs further investigation and could reflect use of different raw materials sources or even the output of different workshops through time.

fat.⁶ The identification of residues of animal and/or plant lipids in the vessels sampled challenges traditional ideas regarding the content of these vessels. Furthermore, the presence of residues derived both from animal and/or plant lipids and tree resins in the same vessel provokes further discussion on the use and re-use of the amphorae. Also, it might indicate a differentiation between the linings of the vessel's wall and the actual content (Beck/Smart/Ossenkop 1989).

Lesbian type amphorae

Lesbian amphorae were roughly as common as Chian amphorae in the “Ypogeio”. Nine inscribed Lesbian amphorae, representing a minimum of four individual vessels, were recently published (*Methone Pierias I*, 345–347 no. 4, 465–470 no. 132–139; Kotsonas 2012, 205–209). All published pieces, and generally all Lesbian amphorae from the “Ypogeio” belong to the grey series (the red series is not represented). These vessels stand out on the basis of their grey coarse fabric and body profile, and are widely distributed in the Aegean and the Mediterranean (Kotsonas 2012, 205–209, with references; Birzescu 2012, 25–35; Sezgin 2012, 201–243).

There are several major studies of Lesbian amphorae, including publications of petrographic and elemental analyses (Clinkenbeard 1982; Dupont 1982, 201–203; Lawall 1995, 196–204; Whitbread 1995, 154–164; Dupont 1998, 156; de Domingo/Johnston 2003, 31–32, 35–36; Dupont 2010; Fantalkin/Tal 2010; Lungu 2010; Lungu 2011). Eleven pieces of Lesbian amphorae from the “Ypogeio” were sampled for the purposes of our project. These samples represent two sub-types identified macroscopically: the light grey, and the dark grey ones, which were thought to be made of the same fabric (Kotsonas 2012, 205–207). The analysis confirmed the macroscopic impression that the samples form a broad compositional (coarse) group with inclusions predominantly associated with a distinct geological unit in Lesbos, the extensive formations of ignimbrites. As a result of a rapid volcanic eruption, these are deposits of volcanic ash with pumice and lithic fragments, which occur across the central part of the island, from around the modern village of Mandamados in the northeast to the east coast of the gulf of Kalloni in the south (see the geological map in Whitbread 1995, 157, fig. 4.15). Despite the overall similarity of the analyzed samples,

⁶ In archaeological samples, degradation processes and the decomposition or elimination of compounds affect the chemical composition of goods originally transported/stored/manipulated. Therefore, assignment to a specific source is usually not straightforward and should be attempted with caution (Evershed 2008).

there are consistent differences among the two macroscopic sub-groups, both technological and compositional, potentially reflecting products of at least two distinct production units in the vicinity of the ignimbrite zone. This picture is largely confirmed by the results of the elemental analysis.

Notably the fabric of the Lesbian amphorae from Methone does not match the (at least) three fabrics identified by previous petrographic analyses on Lesbian amphorae of later date, by Whitbread (1995, 160–161), de Domingo/Johnston (2003, 35–36), and Pentedeka/Georgakopoulou/Kiriati (2012, 151–153). These previously identified fabrics suggest different production locations for Lesbian amphorae, on eastern and western Lesbos and perhaps also on the opposite coast of Asia Minor (cf. Dupont 1998, 158; Dupont 2010, 41–42; Lungu 2011, 189). On the contrary, the vases from Methone are attributed to central Lesbos, which is characterized by ignimbrite formations. Among the known ancient cities of Lesbos, Arisbe lies closer to the geological zone of ignimbrites, while Methymna, which is situated at a close – but considerable – distance, falls within the zone of andesites. If the fabric represented at Methone was indeed produced at Arisbe, its absence among the later Lesbian amphorae noted above could be explained by the historically documented destruction of Arisbe by the Methymnians some time before the mid-5th century BCE (Herodotus 1.151.2; cf. Spencer 1995, 289).

Lesbian wine and viniculture on the island is praised in Archaic and later literature (relevant references are collected in Clingenbeard 1982, 254–256). Accordingly, the amphorae are often taken to have contained Lesbian wine, even though some scholars have also entertained the possibility of olive oil, and two Lesbian amphorae from the Black Sea bear graffiti which suggest they were carrying oil (Dupont 1998, 158, 161–162; Dupont 2010, 38–39, 42–45; Lungu 2010, 52–53, 57, 60, note 84; Lungu 2011, 184, 187 note 50; Kotsonas 2012, 295, note 1408).

Four out of seven vessels from Methone submitted for analysis yielded a series of abietane and pimarane compounds. Abietic and pimaric acids are diterpenoids that constitute the main compounds found in resins of the families of *Coniferae* (i.e. Pinaceae) and *Leguminosae* (Mills/White 1994, 95; Colombini *et al.* 2000). The identification of resins in archaeological vessels is usually interpreted as evidence for resinated wine (McGovern/Mirzoiian/Hall 2009, 2013). Plant resins, however, were also widely applied as adhesives, varnishes and protective coatings, and may be particularly well preserved in various contexts due to their hydrophobicity (Pollard/Heron 2008, 236, 237). Thus, the presence of plant resins alone in the samples under discussion does not necessarily establish direct evidence in support of the use of these vessels for the transportation of wine. Nevertheless, this finding on the Lesbian am-

phorae from Methone obviously recalls the testimony of the literary sources on Lesbian wine.

It is also worth noting that fatty acids, as well as fatty acids along with diterpenoid compounds were identified in at least two of the Lesbian amphorae sampled. The differentiation in the lipidic content preserved between vessels in this case (but also in the case of Chian amphorae in the previous section) challenges the traditional association of a single amphora type with a single product, which remains popular despite recent criticism (Lawall 2011a, 23–25; Lawall 2011b, 43; Kotsonas 2012, 186).

The SOS type amphorae

SOS amphorae are less common than Chian and Lesbian amphorae at the “Ypogeio” of Methone. They are represented, however, both in the filling of Phases I to III, which concerns us here, and the overlying layers of Phases IV to VI. Fifteen inscribed pieces have already been published (*Methone Pierias I*, 349–350 no. 6, 371–372 no. 24, 442–450 nos. 104–113, 496–497 nos. 173–175; Kotsonas 2012, 188–194). The SOS amphorae are named after the characteristic neck decoration they carry, and they are made in a variety of fabrics (Kotsonas 2012, 188–194, with references).

SOS amphorae have attracted several studies, which distinguish between Attic and non-Attic pieces (Johnston/Jones 1978; Jones 1986, 706–712; de Domingo/Johnston 2003, 32–33, 37–38, 44; Kotsonas 2012, 188–194; Pratt 2015). Based on the macroscopic examination of their fabric, the vast majority of the SOS amphorae from the “Ypogeio” were identified as Attic. However, three sub-groups were distinguished on the basis of the coarseness of the material (Kotsonas 2012, 189–190).

Nine samples were selected for compositional analysis. Eight of them indicate a common source and a common recipe that crosscuts two of the macroscopic sub-groups, which were confirmed to belong to one fabric. This is fine/semi-fine, with distinct red textural concentration features and metamorphic inclusions which are compatible with the geology of Attica (Johnston/Jones 1978; Papadeas 2003). These vessels form a tight compositional group that compares well with other Attic pottery from different sites, which was recently analyzed at the Fitch Laboratory through petrographic and/or elemental analysis (Moschonissioti *et al.* 2005, 254–255, 263; Pentedeka/Georgakopoulou/Kiriati 2012, 162–163). Only one of the samples, which represents the coarser of the macroscopic groups, stands out as distinctively different, on the basis of both petrographic and elemental analysis, and may be tentatively associated with a

central Euboean workshop. Ongoing research at the Fitch Laboratory on pottery production at Eretria and Chalcis will hopefully provide a firmer basis for distinguishing between Attic and Euboean products.

SOS amphorae are traditionally considered as oil containers, although some scholars argue that they were also, or solely, used for wine (see mostly: Docter 1991, Kotsonas 2012, 194, Pratt 2015, 17). A few graffiti and inscriptions on SOS amphorae from Pithekoussai and Megara Hyblaea suggest other contents (Bartonek/Buchner 1995, 170–171 nos. 28–30; Gras 1987, 47 note 44; cf. Kotsonas 2012, 194). Our study involving the analysis of seven SOS amphorae does not settle the relevant debate, but enriches it in an interesting way. The results produced from five vessels provide evidence for the preservation of beeswax residues. The components detected in the other two vases could also be derived from beeswax, although contamination issues do not allow further assessment of these samples.

Beeswax is a recurrent find in organic residue analysis of pottery vessels. It is hydrophobic and less vulnerable to degradation processes and might survive for centuries in the ceramic matrix (Heron *et al.* 1994; Evershed *et al.* 1997). Its use in antiquity is poorly known because of the paucity of literary and archaeological evidence for the development of insulation technologies for the transportation and trade of liquid and solid products. In transport and storage vessels, this could have been used as a coating medium to enable better preservation of the content, insulating the porous matrix. Organic residue analysis can be a valuable tool for the investigation of such practices. Beeswax residues were detected in SOS amphorae, but also occur in Thermaic amphorae.

Thermaic type amphorae

This is by far the best-represented amphora type in the “Ypogeio” of Methone and nine inscribed pieces, which represent a minimum of four individual vessels, were recently published (*Methone Pierias I*, 368–369, 416–426 nos. 77–85; Kotsonas 2012, 153–162). The Thermaic amphorae are also known as Catling’s type II amphorae (after Richard Catling 1998, 166–172) and North Aegean amphorae (Papadopoulos 2005, 576; Gimatzidis 2010, 252–274), while several more names are found in Greek scholarship. Nevertheless the term Thermaic best fits the current nomenclature of Greek amphorae by emphasizing the core area of production (as explained in Kotsonas 2012, 154–155). These vessels are characterized by coarse fabric, peculiarities in vessel form, and fairly standardized painted decoration (Catling 1998, 166–172; Gimatzidis 2010, 99–100, 258–262; Kotsonas 2012, 153–162). Thermaic amphorae are widely distributed within the

Thermaic Gulf and, to an extent, across the northern Aegean, from the early 8th to the beginning of the 7th century BCE. The type is much less widespread in the southern Aegean, but by the late 8th century it also reached distant sites, from Pithekoussai in the bay of Naples, to Bassit in coastal Syria (the latest distribution map is offered in Kotsonas 2012, 159–160, but Richard Catling has identified unpublished pieces in several more sites).

Since the specific type of amphora was identified relatively recently, it has not been the subject of much analytical research yet (petrography: Moschonissioti *et al.* 2005, 250, 259–260, 264; elemental analysis: Mommsen *et al.* 2001, 195–196, 203 no. 118). Ten fragments of Thermaic amphorae from the lower deposit at Methone were sampled for compositional analysis. This work is based on comparable, completed or ongoing petrographic analysis of samples from a number of sites in the region by Kiriati and her collaborators (Moschonissioti *et al.* 2005; Kiriati *et al.* 2015) and suggests the existence of at least four distinct fabrics of Thermaic amphorae, potentially associated with production locations around the Thermaic Gulf, across an area extending from the Kassandra peninsula in the Chalcidice to what is now the western edge of the Thessaloniki alluvial plain, but was the northwest coastline of the Gulf in antiquity. These different fabrics are all characterized by sand inclusions associated predominantly with metamorphic rocks present mainly along the east coast of the Thermaic Gulf and/or, more rarely, volcanic rock outcroppings in more distant areas to the northwest of the Gulf, and transported and deposited in the sediments of the coastal alluvial plain of Thessaloniki (Tranos *et al.* 2007). At Methone, the majority of the samples analyzed belong to a single fabric group that contains metamorphic inclusions and rarely grains of altered volcanic rocks. However, specimens of at least two other distinct fabrics have been identified albeit in very limited numbers. The dominant fabric among the Thermaic amphorae at Methone shows significant internal variation, both in terms of petrographic and elemental characterisation, and reflects the use of raw material sources located most probably along the north-northwestern coastline of the Thermaic Gulf, based on the rare presence of altered volcanic rock fragments. At present, the production of such amphorae at Methone itself cannot be safely supported or completely excluded.

There is no literary and epigraphic evidence on the content of the Thermaic amphorae. Nevertheless, several scholars take the morphological standardization of the amphorae to be indicative of standardized content, which is identified as oil (Tiverios 1998, 250) or wine (Tiverios 2012, 180). Arguments for wine find some support in the contextual association of these vessels with grape pips at Karabournaki (Valamoti 2003, 202–203). Nonetheless, it has been previously proposed that these vessels contained a range of contents (Moschonissioti *et al.*

2005, 250), which seems more likely. Unfortunately, plasticiser contamination caused by post-excavation treatment obscures the results from several of the six Thermaic amphorae from Methone sampled for organic residue analysis. The variety of residues identified could also suggest variety in content. Fatty acids are detected in all the samples analysed with $C_{16:0}$ and $C_{18:0}$ prevailing. The diagnostic value of the fatty acids identified is limited, since they are widespread in nature, except for one case where plant sterols and also mono- and di-unsaturated acids bearing 18 carbon atoms were detected. This result suggests the plant origin of the residue.

The analysis of two of the amphorae sampled revealed beeswax residues, probably applied as coating, a feature already discussed with reference to Attic SOS amphorae. It is interesting that this technology occurs on these two amphora types, particularly since Catherine Pratt (2015) has recently drawn attention to the morphological similarities between them. The results obtained give rise to several issues regarding technological choices in relation to insulation practices and their transfer as evidence of interaction. Notably, the same practice has been identified in the analysis of storage vessels from different sites in central Macedonia, which date to the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (Roumpou *et al.* 2003; Margomenou/Roumpou 2011). It is very difficult to provide specific answers on the origins and transfer of this technology at this stage of research with just a limited number of samples. It is clear, however, that this technology for the preservation of foodstuffs was used in Aegean transport amphorae already in the 8th century BCE.

The variability in the residue extracted from Thermaic amphorae is also attested by the identification of diterpenoids (abietane and pimarane compounds) in two of the vessels sampled. The presence of plant resins and its significance for the identification of the content(s) of the vessels has been discussed in previous sections, but also applies to the case of Thermaic amphorae.

Conclusions

Early Greek transport amphorae have not attracted the attention they deserve. We have argued that holistic approaches combining typological and epigraphical evidence with scientific data can revolutionize our understanding of their areas of production, their manufacturing technology, the range of contents they held, and aspects of trade and the early Greek economy. We hope that our collaborative work on the early transport amphorae from Methone will contribute to this direction and shed light on the archaeology of the site and on Protoarchaic trade and interaction in general.

Acknowledgements

This interdisciplinary project (2010–2015) was funded by the Centre for the Greek Language and the Hellenic Ministry of Education’s Operational Programme “Education and Lifelong Learning”, co-funded by the EU (European Social Fund) and the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF 2007–2013). We are grateful to Yannis Tzifopoulos for securing the funds necessary for the project, and to the colleagues at the Centre, John Kazazis and Antonios Rengakos, who have appreciated the significance of this research. We are also grateful to the Harokopio University of Athens and Nick Kalogeropoulos for providing access to instruments and laboratory equipment and genuine support to this project. We have benefited from discussions with John Papadopoulos and Sarah Morris, co-directors of the Methone excavation project. Athena Athanassiadou and Kostas Noulas of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Pieria have offered practical support and advice on Methone and the “Ypogeio” while the staff at the Apotheke in Makrygiolos has facilitated our research in many different ways.

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